



# 2020

## ACTIVITY REPORT



# Message from Founding Chair Mary Robinson



*The past year has been marked by multiple crises, from the COVID-19 pandemic, to a global economic collapse, to the mounting impacts of climate change on people around the world. I've been impressed by how the Centre for Sport and Human Rights, together with its Advisory Council and partners, has made a positive difference, despite the profound changes we've faced. The Centre's role to offer practical, rights-based guidance to sport in responding to COVID-19, as well as the commitment to confront ongoing abuses of athlete rights and highlight the critical role athletes play as champions of racial and social justice, are just a few examples of the many ways the Centre is growing and engaging all actors.*

*The Centre plays a crucial role in being a centre of expertise, in growing this emerging field of sport and human rights, and as a bridge between the*

*sport and human rights communities, working as a convener for a wide range of stakeholders to work together to advance the international human rights agenda. As we look to 2021, let's continue to find strength in our broad and diverse coalition designed to share learning, build capacities and strengthen accountability in the world of sport. We know positive change can happen by facing complex problems together, with human rights for all as our shared mission.*

*Mary Robinson*

**Mary Robinson**  
**Founding Chair, Centre for Sport and Human Rights**



# Message from Chief Executive Mary Harvey

*As we approach the end of 2020, we wanted to take a moment through this update both to look back at what we've achieved in such a difficult year, and to look ahead to what we know will be an equally challenging but also a more hopeful 2021. This activity report includes insights from our team on the year to come and on where we can all work together to make human rights more central to the world of sport.*

*I would like to thank the entire team at the Centre, our Advisory Council, and all of our partners for being so committed and responsive to the changes in our work during 2020 caused by the pandemic. We made significant and important pivots and are pleased with the impact we've had. For example, we scaled up our digital platform, created new resources to help sport respond to COVID-19 in ways that are consistent with human rights approaches, and developed online*

*training on child rights and new forms of engagement through our webinar and podcast series. And there will be more to come in 2021.*

*We'll be launching our strategic plan for 2021-2024 soon, which will provide a clear roadmap for increasing our impact over the coming years. It will include scaling up our work on access to remedy for human rights abuses linked to sport as well as deepening our engagement with a range of sports bodies and host actors around the world.*

*We wish you all a safe and restful end to 2020.*

**Mary Harvey**  
CEO, Centre for Sport and Human Rights

# 2020

## IN FOCUS

**2020** has been a year of upheaval in all our lives. Sport was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and organisations responsible for the governance and management of sport at every level continue to face a range of difficult decisions with significant health and economic consequences.

In response, CSHR worked throughout 2020 to provide practical resources and convened collective action initiatives to support those involved in sport whose human rights have been affected.

Highlights of our activities during 2020 to respond to COVID-19 and other sport and human rights related challenges included:

### **FOCUS 1: PROVIDING NEW RESOURCES FOR THE SPORT COMMUNITY ON COVID-19**

To facilitate a human rights approach to responses to the pandemic, CSHR produced [Putting People First: Guidance for Sport on How to Respond to the COVID-19 Crisis](#). This online resource was designed to support sports bodies and others in taking a people-centred approach to their planning and risk mitigation efforts.

The Centre also created a [Resource Hub](#) to gather together literature and studies to enable those involved in sport to stay up to date with the latest research concerning COVID-19.

CSHR worked with over 30 experts and partner organisations to produce [a study on potential sport related impacts of COVID-19 on children](#). The study brought together the observations and concerns of experts and practitioners in the fields of sports for development, child rights, protection, and safeguarding in sport and its findings were intended for decision makers and others with influence over policies, resource allocations and programming related to children and sport. The study was shared and discussed with sports organisations, national and local governments, inter-governmental entities, international agencies, donor agencies, civil society organisations and community based organisations.

As a follow-up to the report, CSHR convened global experts to produce a six-part podcast series on the impact of the pandemic on children in sport.

In collaboration with several partners, [CSHR responded to the UK government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport call for evidence](#)

[on the impact of COVID-19 on sport](#), placing particular evidence on the impacts to people and how the UK government can ensure sport returns in ways that advance the rights of all people.

## **FOCUS 2: SCALING UP ACTIONS TO PROTECT CHILD RIGHTS IN THE WORLD OF SPORT**

Throughout 2020, CSHR worked on a range of initiatives to advance the rights of children in sport.

### **Awareness Raising on Child Rights in the Sports Environment**

In an effort to raise awareness of child rights violations in sport, a series of presentations were made on the topic at events organised by partners and stakeholders. Among these were a keynote address at the International Congress of International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) and presentations made at events organised by the UN Women Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean and the Council of Europe's Consultative Committee of EPAS. CSHR joined with International Safeguards for Children in Sport and Safe Sport international to promote Safe Sport Day.

### **Strengthening the Evidence Base**

Given that the evidence base on child rights violations in the context of sport is relatively weak, CSHR engaged in exchanges with a range of experts in an effort to advance the creation of knowledge and data on the topic. In addition, it commissioned a study on disclosure by children of abuse in sport. The study is the first phase of a process that aims to improve the timely reporting of child abuse in sport.

### **Child Voice**

In late 2020, CSHR launched a survey to learn from children their views about the impact of the pandemic on their sporting activities. Results will be available in early 2021.

### **Mega Sporting Events (MSEs)**

Actions were taken to build the knowledge base and develop resource materials on child rights in the context of MSEs. This included specific activities related to the 2026 FIFA World Cup™, as well as the development of an online course and generic tools.



Child Mascots at the FIFA World Cup™

### **United 2026**

CSHR and FIFA collaborated in an effort to seize the opportunity of the 2026 FIFA World Cup™ to set a new standard and provide a model for the promotion, respect and protection of child rights in an MSE. In May 2020, CSHR presented to FIFA, a recommended set of 'indicator questions' on child protection, safeguarding and participation for inclusion in the United 2026 Human Rights Scorecard. The 'indicator questions' and accompanying guidance note were the outcome of a consultative process with more than 30 experts and organisations, as well as Consultation hosted by the Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children to validate these tools. In mid-2020, FIFA brought these materials to the attention of the cities bidding to host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™ in Canada, Mexico and the USA. In November, in collaboration with the US Fund for UNICEF, CSHR designed and conducted an online Consultation for the bidding cities. All 23 cities participated in the consultation, which included presentations on the risks to children that need to be considered in planning an MSE and the potential of MSEs to have a positive legacy on children.

### **Resources on Child Rights and MSEs**

CSHR developed an online course on Child Rights and MSEs for prospective 2026 FIFA World Cup™ cities, as well as host cities of other events. Among the topics covered in the course are: human and child rights, safeguarding, child labour, child voice, and legacy. The course uses a mix of presentations by speakers, resource materials, animations, infographics and case studies.

Building on the 'indicator questions' and guide presented to FIFA, CSHR joined with the Office of the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Children and UNICEF to prepare a generic toolkit on child rights for MSE organising committees.

### FOCUS 3: BUILDING NEW DIGITAL PLATFORMS

With the restrictions on travel and in person events during 2020, including the opportunity to meet in person at the annual Sporting Chance Forum that was postponed to 2021 in Mexico City, CSHR worked to scale up its digital platforms to create impact and enhance our reach to new audiences for our work.

#### Webinars

Given the growing importance of the Black Lives Matter movement during 2020, where sports stars played a major role, [CSHR hosted a webinar focused on Athlete Activism and Freedom of Expression](#). The subject was examined through the experiences of athletes themselves, from senior sports governance figures and from a human rights and international legal standards standpoint.

Our [second webinar examined the practical steps sports organisations can take on the critical subject of Athlete Abuse](#). The need for action is urgent and pressing, given the alarming number of new cases of abuse that were brought to light over the past year. The online panel discussion and audience feedback provided helpful insights that were developed into a series of actionable recommendations for the world of sport to follow.

#### Podcasts

CSHR also launched a podcast series to widen the reach of our work and to engage in thoughtful conversations on the intersections between sport and human rights. In our [first episode](#) we spoke to Minky Worden from Human Rights Watch about their report into the abuse of child athletes in Japan [I Was Hit So Many Times I Can't Count](#).

Our [second podcast](#) focused on how NSWL Commissioner Lisa Baird was dealing with the twin challenges of supporting athlete activism and navigating through the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic - just five months into her tenure.

Our [most recent discussion](#) brought together two men who have been at the centre of advancing labour rights in Qatar - Ambet Yuson, General Secretary of the Building and Woodworkers International trade union and Hassan Al Thawadi, the Secretary General of the Supreme Committee

for Delivery and Legacy and the Chairman of the Qatar World Cup Local Organising Committee. Their conversation reflected on lessons learned from how they have cooperated to help ensure that standards developed for the 2022 FIFA World Cup™ take root across the country.



### FOCUS 4: ADVANCING STRATEGY, GOVERNANCE AND OPERATIONS

The past year also marked the start of CSHR beginning to operate entirely separately from its parent charity, the Institute for Human Rights and Business (IHRB). This has meant building a core team to lead our projects, as well as adding expertise on communications, operations, events and administration. During 2020, CSHR was granted Charity Status in the UK, and became an employer in both the UK and in Switzerland, where we opened our office in Geneva. Significant attention has been given to developing a new governance structure for the Centre once it becomes fully independent from IHRB in early 2021, which has included creating a new association in Switzerland, and a process to appoint a new board of Directors. The new association is a bespoke structure that incorporates both the Centre's multi-stakeholder composition and its commitment to independence.

This concerted effort to build the Centre's core staffing and financial resources will set us up to deliver on an ambitious new strategic plan for 2021 - 2024, which will be launched early next year. The strategic plan sets out a framework for the Centre's activities and impacts pursued, with a major focus on the critical issue of strengthening access to remedy for human rights abuses linked to sport.

## FOCUS 5: ADVISORY COUNCIL AND WORKING GROUPS

The CSHR Advisory Council continues to be a critical forum for convening experts and sharing knowledge concerning critical human rights issues in sport, as well as for engaging in collective action to advance human rights within the sector. This year, we added five new Advisory Council members, welcoming UN Women, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), Safe Sport International, the Adecco Group, and the World Federation for the Sporting Goods Industry (WFSGI).

The past year saw the mobilisation of the Advisory Council in response to human rights risks due to the COVID-19 pandemic, providing insight and examples of good practice from a range of stakeholder perspectives and supporting the CSHR team in identifying key risks to sport and developing appropriate responses.

Members of the Advisory Council continued their work to engage in live cases involving human rights abuses in sport. This was most notable regarding cases of systematic abuse of women footballers in Haiti and Afghanistan - just two horrifying examples of structural patterns of abuse within sport. The Advisory Council also sought to prevent the execution of Iranian wrestler Navid Afkari. By bringing together key actors from across the sports ecosystem, CSHR can provide efficient access to critical information and identify opportunities for constructive engagement in tackling real time cases linked to sport.

An additional important role for CSHR Advisory Council members during 2020 was their participation on three working groups - on Mega-Sporting Events, Access to Remedy and Child Rights respectively. These groups have proved to be useful platforms for our partners to exchange information and knowledge, and for all to collectively identify risks and opportunities, which help set priorities in these fields.



Dylan Alcott of Australia at the 2020 US Open. This year's Grand Slam was going ahead without the wheelchair events until protests from Alcott and others forced a reversal of the decision



**JANUARY**

Presentation at the ILO Decent Work in Sport event

**APRIL**

Publication of [Games Time Risk Guide](#)

[Launched Covid-19 Resource Hub](#)



**FEBRUARY**

[Keynote speech](#) at ISPCAN meeting in Doha

Presentation to Sky senior management on human rights risks for broadcasters in sport

Presentation to the IHRB-ILO Hospitality Working Group in Qatar

Workshop for child rights scorecard metrics for the candidate cities of the 2026 FIFA World Cup™

Commenced governance work with Swiss Counsel Bär & Karrer

**MARCH**

[Virtual side event](#) to GANHRI annual meeting to engage NHRIs

Published commentary: [Why local sport is critical to the COVID-19 response](#)

Launch of Child Rights, Remedy and MSE Working Groups

Governance Committee meeting, IOE, Geneva

**JULY**

Became an employer in Switzerland and relocated staff to Geneva

Launched the [Sport and Rights Podcast](#)

Published article: [“Why the world needs athlete activists”](#) (World Economic Forum)

[Webinar on Athlete Activism and Freedom of Expression](#)



**AUGUST**

First podcast on [athlete abuse in Japan](#)

Second podcast on [athlete protests amid the pandemic](#)

Undertook People, Culture and Diversity audit

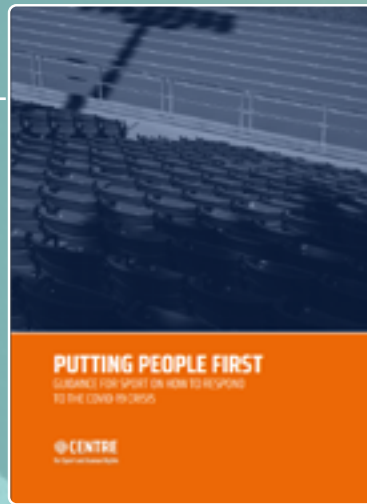
# 2020



## MAY

Published [“Putting People First”](#) - guidance for how sport responds to COVID-19

[Statement](#) on proposed Newcastle Utd take over



## OCTOBER

Podcast on [BWI and Qatar 2022](#)

Consultation on strategic plan for 2021-2024

Consultation on Remedy Strategy

[Webinar on Athlete Abuse](#)

UN Women joins the Advisory Council

## JUNE

[Submission](#) to UK Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on impact of Covid-19 on sports sector

Adecco joins the Advisory Council

Published [“An Overview of the Sport-Related Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children”](#)



## NOVEMBER

[United 2026 and Children Digital Consultation](#)

Second Sporting Events Host Government Forum

## DECEMBER

Remedy Working Group meeting

Launched search for Directors

UNHCR, WFSGI and SSI join the Advisory Council

[Presentation to the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States \(CELAC\)](#)

## SEPTEMBER

Appointed Head of Child Safeguarding and Protection

Publication of [literature review](#) on the risks to children in MSEs

Published [guidance note and recommendations](#) for the child rights scorecard for the 2026 FIFA World Cup™ human rights strategy



# SPORT AND HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES TO LOOK OUT FOR IN 2021

## 1. RESPONDING TO COVID-19

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on sport have been severe, from its finances to its wider societal outcomes. Stadiums have been empty, athletes have been training and competing in isolation, or not at all. Many people, especially children and youth, have lost opportunities to participate in sport. The pandemic has changed the face of sport, and its effects will be felt for years to come.

As long as the pandemic lasts, sport will be played mainly behind closed doors and workarounds such as frequent testing of athletes and league “bubbles” will continue. COVID-19 has set in motion key trends for 2021 and beyond. These include:

- Expanding digital engagement - Sports bodies and leagues were pivoting online before the pandemic as more fans turned to streaming platforms over live TV or physical attendance. The pandemic will accelerate this trend as sports bodies explore creative ways to engage fans digitally. It is also likely to change revenue models for sports that rely on ticket sales, such as women’s football.
- Increasing scrutiny of government sport spending - COVID-19 has made painfully

clear how women’s sport or sport for persons with disabilities among others are critically underfunded. As sport’s financial recovery begins next year, more attention will be directed at where governments spend limited financial resources.

- Continuing access to sport - The economic collapse and loss of jobs threaten people’s access to sport and physical fitness. This can be seen in funding cuts, particularly for grassroots and sport for development programmes. Loss of funding will hit children particularly hard as they are often the main beneficiaries of programmes and so long-term effects may not be fully known for several years.
- Addressing long-term impacts of COVID-19 - The effects of the virus on people’s health over time are still largely unknown with stories of “long Covid”, relapses and difficulty getting back to everyday life. This has potentially serious implications for athlete health and performance in the years ahead.

## 2. CONFRONTING ATHLETE ABUSE

Abuse scandals across sport made headlines this year. Protecting the safety, dignity and wellbeing of athletes will remain a major topic for 2021.

A particular focus is likely to be improved structures for reporting and investigating abuse, with calls for greater independence and better understanding of how to support and include survivors and victims.

Responding to more allegations of horrific and widespread sexual abuse of girls and young women by some of football's most established and senior figures, FIFA announced a consultation process "with the objective of establishing an independent, multi-sports, multi-agency international entity to investigate abuse cases in sports".

While an encouraging step, such initiatives need to ensure broad-based consultations that are independent and fit for purpose, and active ongoing involvement of human rights experts and other stakeholders alongside sporting entities to help keep athletes safe.



### 3. TAKING ON SPORTWASHING

With greater state investment into sports clubs, and events taking place in countries with poor human rights records, scrutiny will continue over where ownership, broadcasting and sponsorship dollars come from. Examples include the attempt by the Saudi Public Investment Fund to takeover Newcastle United FC, and the Kingdom ramping up its hosting of sporting events including boxing, golf, and more recently, being added to the F1 Grand Prix Circuit. All this despite the government's deplorable human rights record. China continues to bid for major events, despite a worsening human rights situation and Belarus, which is set to host the Ice Hockey World Championships, has actively targeted and arrested high-profile athletes for speaking out against the government in this summer's protests.

For 2021 and beyond this means:

- Human rights due diligence in awarding hosting rights - Bidding for sporting events should be open to all, but that should not mean countries can bypass accountability and criticism. Sports bodies need to do due diligence and hold host countries and cities accountable.
- Increased scrutiny for sports financing - The attempted Newcastle United takeover raised significant questions on who should own clubs and it is unlikely to be the last time such an attempt is made. Scrutiny on owners should also be extended to broadcasters and sponsors.
- Stronger use of leverage by key actors in sport - Broadcasters and sponsors should conduct their own due diligence in relation to their agreements to provide financing to sport events, and work to ensure the rights of people are upheld where events are held. Sponsors and broadcasters also have significant leverage with respect to hosts and organisers and can be important stakeholders to open dialogue on human rights issues.

### 4. ENSURING RIGHTS RESPECTING E-SPORTS



While 2020 was marked by many sports being unable to host events, the E-sports industry has seen significant growth in numbers of people participating and gaming options. This development will continue in 2021.

Sports governing bodies are adapting to the change in platform possibilities. The landscape will start to look different as federations look to repeat the success of digital activations like the Virtual Tour de France.

A report from Oxford University suggested that playing video games could have a positive impact on a person's well-being. Where E-sport is concerned, however, greater understanding of the human rights implications is still needed, and the establishment of standards to protect players and spectators is an urgent challenge. In 2021, new tools and resources are needed to safeguard children while playing and in ways that provide necessary data protections. Children's views must be sought to identify where protection gaps exist beyond the important attention to the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

## 5. SUPPORTING ATHLETE ACTIVISM

The past 12 months has brought athlete activism into sharper focus, especially for a new generation. Professional athletes are increasingly taking a stand in organised and coordinated ways on issues that impact them and wider society. High

profile examples have included taking the knee at the start of Premier League football matches, and social justice messages on NBA jerseys. Athletes including Naomi Osaka and Lewis Hamilton have added their voices to the Black Lives Matter movement, and Marcus Rashford has highlighted challenges facing low-income children during the pandemic.

2021 will see the postponed Tokyo Olympics, but the IOC will also need to make a decision on amendments to Rule 50, which currently prohibits "demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda". All sport organisations have a responsibility to ensure that athletes' fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, are respected and in ways that ensure respect for the rights and reputations of others. Many organisations have begun consultations with athletes on this issue and will finalise new rule recommendations by early 2021. These reforms will likely bring significant changes in the way athletes view their platform and how they use it.



# 2020

## ACTIVITY REPORT

### CITE AS

Centre for Sport and Human Rights, “2020 Activity Report (December 2020), available at: <https://www.sporhumanrights.org/en/resources/2020-activity-report>

### IMAGES

Getty Images and Unsplash Images

### COPYRIGHT

© Centre for Sport and Human Rights. All rights reserved. Free reproduction of extracts from this publication is permitted provided that due acknowledgment is given.

### AUTHORS

This report was prepared and edited by the Centre for Sport & Human Rights staff.

### THE CENTRE

The [Centre for Sport and Human Rights](#), a new, independent organization in the world of sport and human rights is committed to implementing human rights in sport through collective action and promoting the [Sporting Chance Principles](#). The Centre unites the key actors involved in sport, in particular those who are committed to embedding human rights into the world of sports, and those whose rights have been harmed, through collective action. Its approach is based on the fact that human rights apply to the world of sports.

**2020**  
ACTIVITY REPORT